

## NYCTICORAX GRISEUS.

### Night-Heron.

- Ardea nycticorax*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 235.  
—— *grisea*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 239.  
*Nycticorax europæus*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xi. pt. ii. p. 609, pl. 47.  
—— *nycticorax*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 560.  
—— *Gardeni*, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Am., p. 48.  
—— *ardeola*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., tom. iv. p. 384.  
—— *griseus*, G. R. Gray, Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 558, *Nycticorax*, sp. 1.  
*Nyctiardea europæa*, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 355.  
*Ardea (Scotæus) nycticorax*, Keys. et Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 80.  
*Nyctirodus nycticorax*, Macgill. Man. of Nat. Hist., Orn., vol. ii. p. 127.
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ABOUT six or seven species of the genus *Nycticorax* are now known, one or other of which inhabits nearly every portion of the globe. Australia is frequented by *Nycticorax caledonicus*, Manilla by *N. manillensis*, Borneo by *N. crassirostris*, Chili and the Malouine Islands by *N. obscurus*, the West Indies and South America by *N. violacea*, and North America by the last-named species and *N. Gardeni*; while the bird here figured is distributed over Europe, the greater part of Africa, India, and China. In England the *Nycticorax griseus* is only an accidental visitor, and does not breed with us, for the simple reason that every individual which makes its appearance is ruthlessly shot before it has time to await the coming of a mate. On the continent of Europe the bird is more common, and, being less persecuted, breeds and rears its young in many of the southern countries. Although I have stated that its appearance in England is accidental, repeated instances of its occurrence have come under my notice ever since I was a boy, when a specimen which had been killed in Windsor Great Park was sent to me in the flesh. Lord Lilford has seen two or three in a season on his estate at Oundle, in Northamptonshire; and in May 1858 the late Earl of Craven presented me with a splendid male, which his keeper had shot on the 6th of that month at his seat, Coombe Abbey, in Warwickshire. In Ireland it is of very rare occurrence; and up to the year 1852 very few had been met with in Scotland.

In the daytime, the Night-Heron is a heavy, sleepy bird, and is usually seen perched on a branch of a tree skirting a forest, whence it sallies forth on the approach of evening, and passes the night in the marsh, by the river-side, or on the border of a large pond, in search of frogs, newts, and other aquatic animals, not refusing insects and mollusks on the one hand or the fry of fishes and shrew-mice on the other. The sexes are alike in colour and in the decoration of the nape, whence spring two or three lengthened white plumes which fall gracefully over the back. The young, on the contrary, are reddish brown, spotted with white, a style of plumage which constantly varies until the bearer attains the adult livery—a period of at least two years. It is this diversity in the colouring of the young and old Night-Herons which has so greatly increased the synonymy of the species—a circumstance much to be regretted, since its earlier name of *grisea* is very inappropriate; but the modern law of nomenclature, which requires the adoption of the earliest specific appellation, does not admit of a more fitting term being employed.

Both Lord Lilford and Mr. Howard Saunders inform me that the Night-Heron is numerous in spring and summer in the wooded marshes on the Guadalquivir, below Seville, and that it breeds there in colonies; in one thicket Mr. Saunders saw nests not more than from five to fifteen feet from the ground.

Bailly, speaking of the bird in Savoy, says:—"It is rarely met with in this country; the few that do visit us arrive in April and May, and the bird is seldom to be seen at any other season. It breeds in several of the southern regions of France, where it builds its nests in marshes among reeds and rushes, upon a stump or willow standing in the water. The eggs are three or four in number, of a pale greenish blue. Like the Herons and Bitterns, these birds arrive at night, at the end of the evening twilight, and very early in the morning, generally one at a time, but sometimes in couples (male and female). Then occasionally may be heard their lugubrious croaking, which, being uttered at night, has obtained for the bird the name of *Nycticorax* (or Night-Raven), given to it by Linnæus. During the daytime it conceals itself in the reeds or shrubs, or perches on the tallest trees, remaining the greater part of the day without moving. After sunset it leaves its retreat, and seeks for food or resumes its journey. It is neither wild nor wary, and is not easily frightened, but shrinks, as it were, into itself and remains in a state of immobility until the intruder has passed. It may be attracted by imitating its cry, which is very similar to that of the Common Crow, *moak*, *moak*. Like the Bittern, it is dangerous when wounded, as it defends itself vigorously."